

### **Comments from supporters of the Volunteer First Responder Loan Forgiveness Act**

“There’s absolutely no doubt that making the decision to become a firefighter, whether full-time or volunteer, means making a huge time commitment to a tough job. So, any time you try to relieve the pressures of student loan debt, I think it’s a 100-percent good decision. I’m glad that someone in Congress like Senator Heitkamp is ready to start finding concrete ways to support volunteer firefighters, especially those trying to start new families or afford new car or home payments once they’re out of college. Student loan forgiveness would be a terrific way to show our nation’s appreciation for the work that volunteer firefighters do every day to keep our communities safe.”

- **Jim Moe, Fire Chief, Devils Lake Fire Department**

“On behalf of the volunteers of the Williston Fire Department, I thank you for introducing the *Volunteer First Responder Loan Forgiveness Act*. This legislation will provide an important incentive for Americans to join the nation’s volunteer fire service and will help us in Western North Dakota recruit and retain volunteers. I am proud to endorse this legislation and look forward to seeing it pass. With one third of our department being volunteers and an essential piece to our operation, we are always looking for ways to recruit and retain. Today’s volunteer firefighters must juggle the demands of work, school and home. We do use incentives but to expand them is cost prohibitive and an opportunity such as the *Volunteer First Responder Loan Forgiveness Act* will be a great assistance. I look forward to working with you to pass this legislation in a timely manner. The volunteer fire service plays an irreplaceable role in our community as well as many others throughout the United States. Volunteer firefighters face both time and financial pressures. This legislation will help recruit Americans and provide them an incentive to join one of the most fun and rewarding opportunities in the nation.”

- **Jason L. Catrambone, Fire Chief, Williston Fire Department**

“The threat of a major home fire, grain bin fire, or grass fire never ends out here in Wolford. In rural communities like ours, my volunteer firefighters are expected to be able to cover a wide response area and respond to an array of emergency calls around-the-clock. In this environment, it can be difficult for our department to recruit among the younger generation, because many potential volunteers think they simply can’t put in the time needed to be a quality firefighter. Because our town depends exclusively on the labor and dedication of volunteer firefighters, we’re always looking for ways to help them out, especially when it comes to paying the bills. That’s why I’m excited about Senator Heitkamp’s bill. If we can take the focus off of major student loan debt and help our volunteers concentrate on the task at hand, they’ll be able to devote more of their time to protecting lives and property and putting down solid roots in our area.”

- **Jim Wolf, Fire Chief, Wolford Fire Department**

“Frankly, I think it’s unacceptable that there are Valley City residents who want to serve our community as first responders but can’t because of the time commitment or financial sacrifice required. As someone who started volunteering with the fire department when I was in college, I understand what it’s like for a young person who’s wanting to serve as a firefighter while also

trying to find a decent-paying job to pay off student loans. I also know that many things have changed since I started back in 1975, and the younger generation of volunteers is often facing much higher student debt loads when they get out of the gate—and it's no fault of their own. I was extremely supportive of Senator Heitkamp's efforts to help volunteer first responders find more affordable housing, and I think this legislation is also an important step in addressing the combination of financial challenges facing today's firefighters and their families."

- **Gary Retterath, Fire Chief, Valley City Fire Department**